

Endorsements

“Mary Snyder is the most perfect person to write a book for girlfriends and their adventures! Her beautiful, tender personality shines through every chapter. I have enjoyed reading each page; but more importantly, I am reinspired to be intentional and purposeful with my friends. May these words teach us all to treasure God’s good gifts to us—girlfriends, grace, and adventures.”

—**Angela Thomas**, best-selling author and speaker

“My friend Mary Snyder has tackled one of the best, yet toughest things we deal with daily. Our friendships. She untangles the truth behind our need for each other and walks us through the challenge of finding the right girlfriends. So whether we are looking for a loyal friend or thankful we have one, Mary will unpack the great adventure of friendship and how to keep it thriving.”

—**Lysa TerKeurst**, speaker and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Made to Crave*

God, Grace, & Girlfriends

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adventures in faith and friendship

Mary Snyder



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Dedication

To the original Tuesday Morning Chicks—
Connie A., Suzi, SuzAnne, Mindy, and Shannon.
Thanks for all the fun, laughs, adventures, and prayers.
Y'all are the best!

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,
who makes all things possible.

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To Traci for the Breaking Free conference ticket, and to Lisa for giving it up—you two rock!

To my incredible friend Lisa Whittle—your prayers and words of wisdom talked me off many ledges.

Now, I'm going to stop here or I'll start thanking my third-grade teacher and the lady who once told me I could write (of course, she's now doing time, but that doesn't mean she couldn't spot talent).

Most of all, to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, who makes all things possible—to Him goes the glory.



Lord, Send Me Girlfriends!

LORD, send me girlfriends. Not women friends who are unbending, uninterested, and dull. I want girlfriends I can giggle with. Girlfriends who want to stand up and be counted. Girlfriends who are up for an adventure and willing to live life out loud. The kind of girlfriends I had when I was young. I want friends I can trust and who accept me for who I am. I want girlfriends who want to make a difference in this world and aren't willing to settle for mediocre. God, please send me real, true girlfriends!

I still remember those heartfelt prayers. The first time I prayed them I was in the midst of changing gears and careers—from corporate worker to at-home mom. What a shock to my system. I thought stay-at-home moms all hung out at the stay-at-home mom places, but I was wrong. Apparently there aren't any stay-at-home mom places in my neck of the woods, or at least not any I was aware of. I quickly figured out friendship was not a built-in perk for this job like it had always been in the corporate world.

The second time I prayed this prayer I was older and wiser. I'd seen the hills and the valleys of friendships. I was blessed greatly

by a group of incredible women—these are my Tuesday morning Bible study girls, the Sally Boos as we named ourselves. Sally Boo is a house on the Gulf Coast we fell in love with at first sight (from the pictures in a rental magazine). Sitting at a Mexican restaurant over chips and salsa, we decided that the Sally Boo was the perfect vacation house for our first trip together. We could just see ourselves on the beachfront decks, watching the waves crash on the shore. We made it to the Gulf, but the Sally Boo wasn't available. We enjoyed our stay in a wonderful condominium instead, and we did make a visit to the Sally Boo and even took a few pictures.

I'd walked the path of lots of fun and little substance, and I found it lacking. I needed more than just good-time girlfriends. I needed women who would challenge me to go beyond myself, women who would never coddle me, enable me, or toss me under a bus. I needed some girlfriends with guts who understood the blessing of grace. I knew that my new girlfriends were just around the next corner. I just couldn't figure out how to get around that corner.

LONGING FOR GIRLFRIENDS

My story is not unique. Women everywhere, in all walks of life, are looking for girlfriends they can depend on. Friends who will stand by them, friends they can laugh with, and friends they can have an adventure with. True-blue, dyed-in-the-wool *girlfriends*. Whether you're in college or retired, a stay-at-home mom or an empty nester, a single career woman or a working mother, you likely can identify with this heart cry of women everywhere: *Lord, send me girlfriends!*

Praying for girlfriends was the beginning of a life-changing journey the Lord had in store for me—a journey I call the great girlfriend adventure. The great girlfriend adventure is about finding and experiencing the greatest relationships of your life, with the women you know today and with women you've yet to meet. I have been on this journey for more than ten years and in this book I'll share some fun, practical ideas you can use to begin your own girlfriend adventure.

Through a series of events I'll describe in the following chapters, God answered my prayers first by taking me down a path of growing closer to Him, and then, in an unexpected way, He blessed me with an amazing and diverse group of friends—some have been around for years and others are fairly new. What I've learned—and I am still learning—is that God will send you the people you need in order to achieve the work He has for you. Through the years, my girlfriends and I have seen one another through the tough times (career changes, legal glitches, teenagers, and countless pet escapades) and the good times (weekend beach trips and three-hour lunches accompanied by peals of laughter). We've laughed, and we've cried. We've prayed and praised together. We've traveled far and wide to meet face-to-face, and we've shared in many adventures.

Before I go any further, let me add that I have an incredible husband who loves me for who I am and who is my best friend. He completely understands my need for girlfriends. He is also the one who can spot a fake at 100 paces—the man has a gift. He sees through the bull, straight to the heart of a person. It's made for some heated discussions. I've defended, and he's just stated what he saw. He's always been right, and I've eaten lots of crow. I've learned to trust his judgment.

The girlfriends in my life hold me accountable—these are the women who will look me dead in the eye and tell me I'm being self-centered and way too focused on me. These are also the women I've given complete permission to knock me off of any high horse I attempt to climb. And trust me, this is something I need. I think we all need it.

While these girlfriends bless my life, they are not my all in all—that is my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He's my everything, but no worries, we have a whole chapter on priorities in this life. But let's get back to girlfriends. I'm not perfect at this girlfriend thing—please don't be shocked. I've messed up more than once, well...OK, more than twice, but these incredible women are still my dearest friends. I've asked for forgiveness, and we've moved on to many other girlfriend adventures together. Some

adventures were just down the road, and others crossed many miles. We've studied God's Word together and stood in awe of His grace. We've prayed face-to-face and on Skype calls. We've stormed the gates of heaven for a sister in need. We've watched arm-in-arm in service and in silence. Then there was the one that involved a closed bridge, a police officer, and some melting cherry chocolate chip ice cream—but that story comes in a later chapter.

All along the way, God has shown me that He has His hand of blessing on these girlfriends—my answered prayers. And not only these women, but on the other friends God has yet to bring into my life. I'm looking forward to meeting them along this journey!

OUR GIRLFRIEND ADVENTURE

Over the years, I've learned a lot about finding friendships and building the kind of relationships that go far deeper than small talk and coffee breaks. I've made some bad choices, and oh my, the messes I've gotten into are too numerous to mention. But the Lord is faithful, and He continues to allow me to walk this amazing journey of friendship. He's also given me the tools and ideas for building truly enriching, lasting, grace-filled friendships with godly women. And while I don't have all the answers, I do know the One who does. It's my joy to share this journey with you—we'll laugh, sigh, and say, "Oh my!" together, and I pray that you'll see the joy of girlfriends.

In the upcoming pages, we'll talk about all things girlfriend and many things adventure. We'll also talk about guts, grace, and above all of this, Christ, because as we find in Colossians 1:17: "*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*" Outside of Him, these relationships don't work, and outside of Him these adventures are too much about me and not about Him and His grace. I'll share more details of my own personal journey, and I will also share some amazing stories of women I've met along the way. Women who have grabbed onto God and His adventure. These women challenge me and inspire me. You may recognize a name

or two, but most are just girls out there loving Jesus and saying yes to His call on their lives.

In part 1, we'll take a look at finding godly girlfriends, with plenty of ideas for how you can find and experience healthy friendships (and avoid toxic ones), keep your friendships in perspective, and grow closer to God by praying together and keeping one another accountable. Then in part 2, we'll dive into girlfriend adventures where I'll give you plenty of planning advice and travel tips on how you and your friends can enjoy an extended time together to deepen your friendship, create lasting memories, and reach beyond yourself.

So let's dive into this girlfriend adventure together. Whether you have a host of wonderful, godly girlfriends or are asking God to send you a few new and dear ones, I know God has some fabulous treasures for you along the way.

Finding Friendships



Part I



The Great Girlfriend Adventure Begins

MY WINDING PATH

I love a challenge. Finding girlfriends after becoming a full-time, at-home mom was the challenge I faced. I wanted some women who were walking this journey, and I meant to find them. This became not only my attitude but my plan of attack when I started looking for girlfriends. I looked around all types of corners. I volunteered at my older daughter's school and met a few women, but everyone seemed too busy. I went to several toddler playgroups with my younger daughter, but I didn't find anyone who seemed to be a likely friend. I asked my neighbors about any local women's groups or clubs, but no luck. Through my volunteer efforts at the school and in our community, I did make some new friends—but not the *Steel Magnolias* kind of girlfriends I'd been hoping for. But I didn't give up. I knew those girlfriends were out there. I just had to find them.

It was during this time that the Lord called me back into church—though He'd probably been calling me for a long time, and I just wasn't listening. I spent my early years in church

and became a follower of Christ in junior high, but during my somewhat turbulent teen years I drifted far from my faith and ended up in some bad situations. After my first marriage ended, leaving me a single mom at age 24, I realized that I needed to get my act together—if not for myself, then for the little girl who was depending on me for everything. And God provided. He sent me an amazing man who became my husband and adopted my daughter, and then He blessed us with another adorable daughter. Vaughn and I taught our children Bible stories and often led them in bedtime prayers, but we hadn't yet made church a regular part of our family life.

After four years of marriage, Vaughn and I both felt a tug to get involved in a regular fellowship. We soon found a wonderful church in our area, and I began helping out in all kinds of ways. I worked in Vacation Bible School, led a moms prayer group, chaperoned children's trips, and participated in all types of women's events. I loved serving in God's church. There was just one problem: I was so busy serving in my church that I forgot the most important thing—sitting at the feet of Jesus.

During those lonely days when I was praying for girlfriends, God began answering my prayers by drawing me closer to Himself. I realized that Jesus wanted me to fill that empty place in my heart with a relationship with Him, to make sure He was the first and best friend in my life before I started looking around to satisfy my longing for girlfriends. I learned that Jesus wanted me to submit my entire life to Him, and then He would not only care for my every need (Matthew 6:31–33), but He would also give me the desires of my heart (Psalm 37:4), including my desire for girlfriends. It was time for me to deepen my relationship with my Lord. (For more on how you can begin your own relationship with Jesus, see chap. 7.)

I joined a women's Bible study at our church and immersed myself in the Scriptures. I loved how God spoke to me through His Word, and I began putting into practice the truths He revealed to me. I adored studying God's Word with my sisters in Christ in our Sunday-night Bible study. Our sessions usually ran

two hours—and that was only on the nights we didn't get too carried away. If we had talked as long as we wanted, we would have been there for much, much longer!

Those Sunday-night Bible studies were challenging and exciting for me, but they were difficult on my family. Sunday night was a busy night at the Snyder home—there was homework to check, clothes to get ready, baths to take, and lunches to pack. I felt torn: I wanted to be a part of this ongoing Bible study, but it was hard on my family, and I didn't like getting home after my daughters were in bed. I prayed about the situation and tried to find an answer, but nothing came. I knew God wanted me to study His Word, and I knew the women's Bible study was blessing my life, but I couldn't understand why it also caused me such guilt and grief.

I examined the situation, trying to find what wasn't working for me. I soon realized that Bible study itself wasn't the problem—after all, I loved the Bible study and enjoyed being with other women—the only problem was the time. *I can fix that*, I thought. *We'll just do a daytime study instead!* It seemed easy enough. I talked with several women in the church who agreed that a morning Bible study was a great idea. Now we just had to find the right leader.

WHO, ME? A BIBLE STUDY LEADER?

After a few weeks of searching, no one came forward to lead a daytime women's Bible study—and trust me, I asked quite a few. Then several women suggested that perhaps I could lead the group. I was shocked. Me? How could I lead a Bible study? I was just getting to know God's Word; I certainly didn't feel qualified to teach others. I had to be some kind of Bible scholar to lead a Bible study, right? At least that's what I thought.

So I prayed about the situation. *Lord, should I lead this Bible study? Surely that's not Your plan. You know I'm definitely not the typical church lady. Will people accept me as a leader, with all my flaws?* Then I picked up a few leaders' guides for group studies and realized that if we chose the right Bible study, I could be more of

a facilitator than a leader. Facilitating a group sounded a lot less frightening to me than leading one.

God began to make it clear that He would handle the details; I just needed to follow His guidance and lead this time of studying His Word along with other women. I took comfort in Scripture passages such as Luke 21:14–15, in which Jesus says, “*Make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom.*” Goodness knows, I needed God to give me “*words and wisdom*”! I talked with my pastor, and he agreed that a daytime women’s Bible study would be a great idea. And bless his heart, he even liked the idea of me as the leader. He encouraged me and gave me some sage advice on leading a group.

So I stepped out on faith...OK, it was more like a giant leap of faith into this adventure. The word went out—Tuesday morning women’s Bible study would begin in a month.

FINDING GIRLFRIENDS

My focus for the next few weeks was this new adventure God had for me. I spent my time planning the upcoming class—figuring out the details and laying the groundwork for how and where we would meet. In fact, my focus had been on God and His will for such a long time that I had completely forgotten about my initial search for girlfriends. Sure, I still longed for girlfriends from time to time, but God was fulfilling that empty place in my heart with His love. I was finding my joy in Him. I didn’t know it at the time, but God was preparing me for my great girlfriend adventure.

When the Tuesday morning Bible study was announced that next Sunday, I wasn’t sure if anyone would sign up. But ten brave souls did, and they were an eclectic group—including stay-at-home moms, grandmothers, working women, and women from other churches. Some of these women I had known for years through church or my daughters’ school, some I had just a passing acquaintance with, and others I had never met. But it didn’t matter; I was just thrilled that people signed up. I was equally

elated and scared out of my mind. *Lord, what do I do now? I don't want to mess this up.*

I prayed, prepared, studied, and then prayed some more before that first meeting—and then I promptly forgot all that preparation. But thankfully God was with us, and His grace covered all my mistakes. We survived—and more than survived, we thrived. We learned together as God taught us from His Word, and the Scriptures came alive in our lives. Every Tuesday morning, we hurried to get husbands to work, older kids to school, and the little ones dressed to come along for a couple of hours of playing with friends. We couldn't wait to get to Bible study and share our latest adventure. We shared prayer requests and exciting answers to our prayers. We shared the ups and downs of life. We shared our struggles and our failures. We told stories of our pasts and talked about our desires for the future. As we continued to get to know one another, we discovered that God was knitting our hearts together.

God blessed me tremendously—I found my girlfriends.

We grew closer as each week passed. There was nothing special about any of us—we were just regular women. But through our walk with the Lord we found each other, and that's where the spark began. This group of ordinary women became extraordinary friends when we joined together to study God's Word and apply His teachings to our lives. The incredible bonding that came from sharing life concerns and praying for each other was the start of something amazing!

Five of these women have become my dearest friends. The Tuesday Morning Chicks, as we call ourselves, range in age from 30s to 50s, and we are all very different. There's the down-home girl who loves bluegrass and blue jeans, another who loves shoes and purses, and one who saves lives in her spare time. There's the sweet girl who just loves everyone, and the financial professional who meets with us before heading off to run her business. And then there's me—a far less than perfect, slightly frazzled, but usually optimistic dreamer.

More than a decade has passed from that first Tuesday morning Bible study, and much has happened in those years. My girlfriends and I have changed in some ways—crow’s-feet and a few extra pounds for me, but that’s only the external. Some have forged new careers, and others have found new places to serve in ministry. Some have sent little ones off to school, and others have celebrated as children graduated high school and moved on to college and even marriage. Many of us have moved to new churches, new jobs, and new towns, but we’re still the Tuesday Morning Chicks.

There have been other changes too. We’ve matured spiritually and learned many important life lessons together. We wear a few battle scars from spiritual attacks. (The evil one doesn’t like a group of joy-filled women who love God and proclaim His grace loudly.) We’ve prayed together, asking God to care for our friends as only He can. We’ve suffered through some trying times in our families and in our relationships, but we’re still friends. We are older, wiser, and more in love with the Lord.

Would you like to have a group of girlfriends like this? Are you ready to take the first step to begin your own girlfriend adventure? Then keep reading! In the upcoming chapters, I’ll share tips on how you can find and experience God-honoring friendships with other women.

Questions

1. “Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:3–4). God wants you to trust Him and enjoy His presence, and that’s hard to do if you’re not spending time with Him. Do you trust the Lord and delight in His presence? If not, what specific things can you do in your life, starting right now, to begin spending time with God each day?
2. Read Ephesians 3:16–19. In these verses, the apostle Paul describes the immensity of God’s love for us—a love that far surpasses our human understanding. God desires that you understand this love, and the only way you can understand God’s love is to spend time with Him. Set aside 15 minutes today to spend with the Lord. During that time, read these verses and write down what they mean to you.
3. “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4). The King of kings and Lord of lords wants us to rejoice in Him. How amazing is that? Read Philippians 4:4–8. In a notebook or prayer journal, write out a prayer to God, admitting your shortcomings and sharing your requests. Go ahead, be honest! And then lay it all before the Lord and rejoice in His presence in your life, knowing He will work everything out to His glory in His time.

